DHAKA THURSDAY AUGUST 29. 2002

Gas committee reports

PM's welcome emphasis on national consensus

HE government committees for gas export have submitted their reports with the prime recommendation that gas should be exported only if new fields are found. At this point gas is inadequate for export. It has also made an estimate that the total recoverable gas is between 12.04 and 15.55 TCF.

There are numerous other recommendations but what is most significant is the fact that the Prime Minister has said that the reports will be made public and a national debate will be initiated on the issue. Developing a national consensus on what has become the most prickly issue in recent times is indeed a matter that draws commendation. This is a good example of settling contentious politico-economic issues through debate and consensus building.

By handing over the scrutiny of the report to two expert committees the government did do something extremely right. It was not a simple arbitrary political decision on an issue that had assumed extremely volatile stances on various sides but one which was splitting people into camps. However, the government allowed the process of scrutiny to happen by those who knew and this transparency will now be a major strength of the government in its own position of taking onboard the various other points of interest, both local and national on the matter.

The expert committees have also made observations on various other issues and these too should be taken in the spirit they were made. A critical point in this is the production costing which has caused uncomfortable murmurs. These can now be examined if need be on more firm footings of a thorough scrutiny made by independent experts.

What really has come out as the winner in the entire process is the platform of transparency and independent decision-making which has taken the mystery out of the matter. This decision now is that of the experts and if one goes by what the party in power wishes to do, we may well have a public participation in the decision-making. This is a major progress in installing a positive system in dealing with such national issues.

If such processes are established, the authorities, whoever they are, may well one day be able to export gas if the need arises because that decision too will emerge from the same participatory process. This sharing of the responsibility amongst the authorities, the experts and the people is a genuine example of how governance may is best practised and for this the government deserves to be congratulated.

Competitiveness of local enterprises

Negative factors should be eliminated

■ E have in hand the Global Competitiveness. Report (GCR), 2001 prepared by the World Economic Forum which ranked Bangladesh 71st among 75 countries evaluated. The Bangladesh enterprises' competitive edge vis-a-vis those of other countries may have subsequently declined. For, the GCR, 2002 which is in the works under the joint supervision of the Centre for Policy Research (CPD), Dhaka and the Centre for International Development (CID) of the Harvard University, has already found sufficient evidence of a dwindling competitiveness of our enterprises.

How competition-worthy our enterprises are has been measured in terms of both their local and foreign market orientations. Of the 71 companies surveyed 45 per cent catered for mostly domestic market while 23 per cent were fully export-oriented

An emphasis has been laid on certain broad factors in addition to the traditional concept of the macro-economy. Low public confidence in political leadership reflecting on the confrontational atmosphere has tended to undercut the competitive edge of our local industries.

Organised crime thrives on restive political atmosphere, poor governance and police failures. Racketeering, extortion and rent-seeking have not merely impeded business growth but also led to high costs of conducting the same.

The resultant high costs of production impel the manufacturers and business people to raise their prices thereby reducing the competitiveness of their merchandise.

The global competitiveness reports need to be taken seriously by all concerned for a turn-around in the situation. Either we compete or perish.

American dream and nightmare



RESIDENT John F. Kennedy wrote the Profile of Courage. He won the Pulitzer Prize. President George W. Bush is into scripting what looks like his second chapter of Epic of Disaster -- in the eye of the world. He is likely to earn derision

The 'world changed' and 'history re-begun' after Nine-Eleven. But that changed world and recommenced history has changed doubly over and been cast further adrift since the physical invasion of Afghanistan last year.

Given her technology, couldn't the US think of realising her antiterrorist objectives without invading the territorial sovereignty and integrity of another nation-state? A country's sovereignty is not just territorial. it's fundamentally popular -- it's people's sovereignty, their pride of possession, in a highly emotional and passionate sense of what is called patriotism. This is something that one making minced meat of another state's sovereignty always overlooked. If anything, the physical invasion of Afghanistan, a Muslim state, only reinforced Bush's patently divisive policy statement on international order: "You are either with us or with them. The potion that pot-boiled in the

run-up to the Operation Searchlight in Afghanistan is cooking up prior to what looks like an inevitable US invasion of Iraq. The same spurt in humanitarian concern for women and children this time, of Iraq, the worst-hit victims of sanctions since the Gulf War, is in evidence appar-

With El Gore, the Democrat presidential candidate in the last US elections making out a strong case for restraint in Iraq, Vice President Dick Chenev of the Republican administration could not fall behind; he promptly said, "Risk of inaction would be greater than that of action" so that "the matter better not be left for any future administration."

Such adventurist agenda is gaining ground despite the fact that prefers surgical intervention against Saddam Hussein before Irag joins the nuclear club.

Generally, the US people and the Congress feel they need to be persuaded of any rationale there is for taking such a perilous course. Iraq is no Afghanistan; it has the world's sixth largest armed forces. They want evidence to support the oft-repeated apprehension that Iraq is joining the aspiring nuclear weap-

Arab world in a chorus of disapproval of Bush planning to attack Iraq. Refusing to support any US bombing of Iraq he prophesied such on action would be neither in the interest of the Arab world nor the US herself. Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Turkey, Kuwait, Qatar, the countries which the US thought might provide her with a launching pad have expressed reservations against US

ners took six weeks to succeed in vacating Iragi invasion of Kuwait. This, however, precludes the whole range of repercussions that followed those two wars

As an ironic contrast to the present scenario, in the Iraq-Iran war, the US sided with Iraq: being neutral in the Gulf War did not mean "we don't have sympathies" (a US spokesman in 1985). The US sympathies did not lie with Iran, then a terrorist state in the eye of the US. but strangely president Reagan had to contend with the Irangate scandal centring around arms supply to Tehran. And, subsequently by a twist of history in 1989 when the coalition forces attacked Iraq, most of Saddam's fleet of air force planes received sanctuary in Iran!

All this conjures up a highly complicated situation the US will dip its feet in if she decides to embark on a misadventure in Iraq, especially all by herself.

One-time Republican government's secretary of state Henry Kissinger quoted former Democrat president John F. Kennedy on the subject of 'morality and policy' thus: The necessity of peace is itself a moral imperative ... in the final analysis our most basic common link is that we all inhabit this small planet. We all breathe the same air. We all cherish our children's future

The international priorities

And we are all mortal.

JUST ANOTHER VIEW

One-time Republican government's secretary of state Henry Kissinger quoted former Democrat president John F. Kennedy on the subject of 'morality and policy' thus: The necessity of peace is itself a moral imperative ... in the final analysis our most basic common link is that we all inhabit this small planet. We all breathe the same air. We all cherish our children's future. And we are all mortal... The international priorities should lie with the living rather than with the dead.

ently before the bombing sorties begin. Voluntary contributions are in the pipeline for those we would call 'sitting ducks'. The US authorities have liaised with three different alliances in exile who are opposed to Saddam Hussein and would be interested in his ouster. They have had meetings between themselves as well. The Kurdish opposition and the Sunni-Shia divide (55 to 45 per cent) are up for utilisation. Not long ago, there was even an Iragi embassy take-over in Prague, apparently by some maverick foes of Saddam that hogged media headlines and fitted into the prevail-

a US council for national image assessment has found a fall in the goodwill standing of the lone superpower in the world

The American people are divided on the question of invasion. There is one mindset that recognises the primary need for stability in the Middle East arguing that if the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can be solved terrorist threats will substantially subside. But this line of thinking is considered traditional; and even out of date after Nine-Eleven.

The other American thoughtprocess seemingly a broader manifestation of the dove-hawk differentiation in the US establishment

ons states like other members of the 'axis of evil'. No new clues to any serious threat perception have been furnished.

There are talk-show hyperboles like people will dance in the streets of Baghdad on sighting bomber aircraft from their roof-tops: Kurds will find themselves in ecstatic embraces, etcetra. But the Lebanese didn't dance in the early eighties following US intervention.

Only Israelis will.

Egyptian President Hosne Mubarak, partner of the US coalition against Irag in the 1989 Gulf War and a consistent friend of Washington, has been the latest to join the

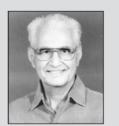
Commonsense says if the US attacks Iraq, inflamed Arab people might descend into total chaos, a state of anarchy potentially more grave than the 1967 imbroglio.

Iraq had fought a long, staminatesting war with Iran for eight years (1980-88). Fact that US is a superpower adversary to Iraq does not quite make a clean sweep of a win for her. For, this has to be tested against the knowledge that even for primitively-armed Afghanistan, the US invasion lasted more than a month to vield any clear result. And. the UN-authorised Operation Desert Shield participated by an impressive array of coalition part-

should lie with the living rather than with the dead

SH Imam is Associate Editor of The Daily Star.

A leap backward



M B NAQVI

HE new (amended) Constitution of Aug 21, given by General Pervez Musharraf, was in fact another coup d'etat against the people of Pakistan. We are back to at least 1985, if not 1970. It was a direct assault on both democracy by providing for President Musharraf's supremacy over the Parliament and on the federal character of Pakistan polity. This comes from re-imposing Article 58(2)(B), creating an NSC and his continuing as an allpowerful President while he would remain the COAS almost indefinitely. This 'real' democracy is obviously tailored around the needs of Mr. Pervez Musharraf who will overshadow and bend the socalled 'democratic institutions'. Bush administration claims it has remained engaged with the COAS-President of Pakistan over these matters. Should we not then blame them some?

the federal character of the Constitution is obvious, though without receiving much attention. What most democrats have so far said concerns the empowerment of one man: Gen. Musharraf. Look closely. What is so unique about Mr. Musharraf: Nothing except that he is the COAS, able to order other generals over the short run. His remaining supreme, overriding the

men and women, over time will need the propitiation and appearement of the generals more or less demonstratively. In people's eyes the importance and centrality of the Army's opinions shall remain decisive. The socalled 'real' democracy, i.e. the essence of current regime will be carried on by the soon-to-beelected government(s). But they will survive so long as they do as generals tell them. That will also make

ble with his political design.

The people of Sindh, Baluchistan and NWFP are familiar with Army's social and political visage. They know the economic policies if favours -- which have been followed by all regimes since Ayub Khan's. That underlines the orientation of policies the new 'really' democratic regime will follow. When people of smaller provinces talk about Punjabi domination they mean two things:

superiority means the disregard of minority provinces' interests; Army's domination is regarded as Punjabi domination -- an antithesis of federal spirit. Minority provinces have experienced Army's internal operations. The NWFP remembers preand post- independence violent suppressions; who can forget the 1973-77 operations in Baluchistan or Sindh's experiences in 1980s during the MRD movement. That

PLAIN WORDS

What kind of elections are held will depend on what General Musharraf and his courtiers' Round Table will

find expedient and possible. But an election being election, it theoretically is open to several possibilities.

Conceivably even today, the politically aware minority create a turmoil that can prevent rigging on the

polling day and possibly also in tabulating and announcing the results, though it has already lost the war

by changes in the Constitution. ..But if politicians and voters somehow display spine and sense, they can

Despite these forebodings there is not much danger to the state of Pakistan for two good reasons: Most Pakistanis, tragically poor, are ignorant of their rights and bereft of hope or determination to assert their own rights: they are unable to resist being pushed around or suppressed. Being fatalists, they see religion as teaching them contentment with what God has given -kismet cannot be changed -- and

able. Words do not cost much. Besides they can be interpreted in different ways depending on the occasion. While welcoming the US statement, none can forget the US interests in this region. They need a Musharraf-led Pakistan in its War against Terror. Talking about democracy sounds good, while having a firm ally like Musharraf is an operational necessity of the Pentagon, NSC and White House. Any real weakening of Musharraf's hold on power is not in the US interest. What of elections, then?

What kind of elections are held will depend on what General Musharraf and his courtiers' Round Table will find expedient and possible. But an election being election, it theoretically is open to several possibilities. Conceivably even today, the politically aware minority create a turmoil that can prevent rigging on the polling day and possibly also in tabulating and announcing the results, though it has already lost the war by changes in the Constitution.

But if politicians and voters somehow display spine and sense, they can cause real trouble. The political parties that have accepted the Pakistan Bar Council's declaration can stick to opposing the new role of a ringmaster in the intended new political circus that Gen. Musharraf, assisted by his corps commanders and the NSC, has fashioned for himself. But they will have to forswear toadyism -- the only thing that can give them the coveted prizes of ministerships through flattery. Can they resist the temptation? Future of democracy for a decade or so depends on their choosing the people's rights and ignoring Musharraf and Americans. Would they?

MB Naqvi is a leading columist in Pakistan.



One aspect of this blitzkrieg on democratic institutions and elected

cause real trouble

vulnerable to generals' pressures.

The President will appoint Gov-

ernors in his discretion who will be

his minions and acting in his inter-

ests. The Governor of a province will

have Musharraf-like powers vis-à

-vis the CM and Provincial Assem-

blv. So a dismissed CM will know

who to blame. President Musharraf

will be thus supreme in the provin-

cial sphere. That drives a coach and

four through what autonomy the

provinces had under 1973 Constitu-

tion. Does that leave the local gov-

ernment's autonomy in tact? Well.

there is as yet no delimitation of

powers and functions between the

provinces and local governments.

The Constitution as would be

revived leaves little room for local

governments' autonomy. But if the

President wants to make the local

elected bodies exempt from his

supremacy, they will become auton-

omous. But that is scarcely compati-

But that is how this game is played.

Musharraf progressively more an Army-dominated regime that has created sensitivities in Sindh, hence they are docile and passively follows policies which hurt the Baluchistan and NWFP. Even their accept whatever happens. So long common people everywhere. But people of smaller provinces suffer far more than those of the Punjab. Which is why there are so many regional disparities in development,

income and especially of opportuni-

But there is a second reason for Sindhis and others feeling aggrieved at the Puniabi domina-No serious-minded Sindhi objects to the people of Puniab getting their full share of everything. But the trouble arises when Sindhis and Baloch find themselves in need of relief in everyday problems. They find no local officer giving them a sympathetic hearing; all too often they find a stranger from a distant place to deal with. But Punjabis find a familiar figure of a Punjabispeaking official and can get things done more easily even under Martial Laws

In minority provinces Army's

Islamabad has dealt with them. Autonomy demands is a deeply felt and intellectually argued demand. No democrat can dispute the need for effective autonomy for provinces where people feel they have a distinctive identity and interests. Without real autonomy to provinces -- which will not be available now --Pakistan Federation will go on weakening.

Where everything is subject to the will of one general, it is essential military dictatorship, not a democracy. Post October regime will certainly be elected despite the polls' fairness being possibly questioned. But if elected politicians are seen kowtowing to the General in command -- for fear of having the whole elected paraphernalia overthrown -- not only there will be no democracy, Pakistan's federal character will go on being diluted.

bureaucrats are bitter about how as this situation lasts, no dictator need worry. Generals can confidently plan for a future takeover because the docile Pakistanis will accept all humiliations. Secondly an outside world led by

the US exists. Foreigners find Pakistan useful. They will help it survive. Pakistani rulers' dependency syndrome today ensures that what the American government wants will happen. Which is why Oct 10 polls would not be postponed. Even cynics need to know what does the Bush government really want. Here is a word of cheer for the mainstream politicians: US State Department does not think that the polls under the Musharraf Constitution can yield 'strong democratic institutions' which the US is supposed to have been seeking. They can thus pin some hope

Lest euphoria breaks out among certain leaders, caution is advis-

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE

"Letters to the Editor"

Thanks to Jafar Chowdhury for his frank comment and opinion (August25). I am also with him to "let go all the

letters.." unchanged, unedited, as I have also observed that sometimes the very essence of my mind and opinion remains unventilated and published with less impact (of my feelings) due to undue censor But perhaps his suggestion to let go 'unending debate' (on any sub-

ject) is not reasonable. There must be some end to it, as thought justified (before it goes out of limit or becomes boring). I do support the writer and say

'please correct the language but not the substance'. After all as it is a known norm (motamoter jainnya sampadak daiee noy) "editor is not responsible for the opinion expressed by the writers" AF Rahman Dhaka

Diabolical!

This refers to your report "New twist in M-16 tale" (Star Report, August 23). Nothing has been heard from the Police Department about this story which, if it is true, it can only be described as a diabolical plan by an evil member of the department. We want to know more about this police officer and his plans and what the authority has to say about it. AZM Abdul Ali

"Absentee expatriates" and "English medium students in trouble"

I would like to thank both Zafar Hadi and Iqbal Ahmed for their letters "Absentee expatriates" and "English medium students in trouble" respectively (August 25) First of all, Zafar Hadi has men-

tioned about patriotism by 'Bangali foreigners' in his letter 'Absentee expatriates'. I agree with him that, even if us, the 'expatriates' are thousands of miles away, we never forget our roots! We try our best to help our country and also make our 'desh' recognisable to the outside

anything for their country! It's just that the majority of 'desi' people think that we sit on our backs eating foreign government charity and talking about 'Bangladeshi economical unsuitability'! Even if some expatriates do that, what's the harm? At least they're not looting Bangladesh-- like some 'desi' politicians! Most 'desi' people also undermine our talents and pick on our bad habits. Many of us 'expatriates' can afford to go around the world with our 'hard earned money', but we prefer coming to Bangladesh during our summer holidays. Irrespective of what 'desi' people have to say about us, we do our economy a 'huge favour' by coming to 'desh'. At the end of the day, every nation has it's own ocean of 'milk and honey'-we just have to look for it.

However this does not mean that,

the so-called 'desi' people don't do

As for Mr. Igbal Ahmed, his letter on "English medium students in trouble" was very good indeed. However. I also have to admit that there were very good letters against the whole argument. English Language is now an international language

And it is also important to know Bengali-- as it's our mother tongue. We should not undermine and compare Bangla medium students with English medium students. I think both the mediums have separate privileges. Bangladesh can also be proud of its primary and secondary education, as it is amongst the best in the world Gemini F

On e-mai

"Great Army" I recall a story of my yesteryears. A person found a feather in his soup. By the time the story got around, the person had supposedly found a crow flying out of his soup bowl! The discussion in this column began with someone being turned away at the cantonment gate after 11.00 p.m. and hence the irate person's comments. Look where the discussion has gone to! From corruption in the Forces to the Fly-over bridge under construction in Mohakhali! Quite a crow, I must say.

It is the civilian politicians who make everyone, everything corrupt. So stop picking on the only remain-

ing institution that can still instil some pride in us. Stop crowing and do your best to contain the hydraheaded dread of corruption in our society

Sarwar Ahmed Dhanmondi, Dhaka

I hope, Mr. Citizen knows what the very word "citizen" means. A citizen does have some rights and one of them is the right to own property of his own choice

None should blame the military because of the location of the cantonment. But for its own sake, military should try to reduce its prominent presence in a city centre for the following reasons:

1)Public relation: Military should not alienate the people for obvious reasons.

2)Security and safety: It is much easier to maintain good security and safety of a military installation if it is away from major civilian population

3)Seclusion form political hotbed: Military needs to keep a certain distance for the political establishment. Too much schmoozing with

the civilian power brokers is not healthy for a military psyche. Matter of the MIG! We all are for

it! But guess who is paying? It's you, he/she and me. Dear Mr. Citizen, it is obscene to plunder resources for a high-flying MIG in the name of defence when citizens of the country are utterly defenceless against crime, poverty and hunger. A nation that can not defend its own citizen is a defeated nation

A concerned citizen

Thank you

I enjoy your various column written by Brig Hafiz, Kuldip Nayar and many others This time I am impressed over

the analysis made by Barrister Harunur Rashid in his column (August 18) over America's recent position on Kashmir.

I will appreciate it if you kindly convey my heartfelt thanks to Barrister

Whatever may be his analysis it appears that the USA is not interested in any solution regarding Kashmir issue.

Syed Moazzem Hussain

EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

"Poverty, crime and affluence'

Being inspired by Mr. Mohammad Badrul Ahsan's article "Poverty, crime and affluence" (August 16), I am highlighting few thoughts about Financial Crimes'

It's pretty obvious that the major financial crimes are committed by the rich and powerful. The poor have absolutely nothing to do with it. In fact they got the other end and have become even poorer. Billions of taka have been and are being sucked out of state coffers with no end in sight.

It's no secret that these crimes are in general patronised by the people who run the government. Our Finance Minister Mr. Saifur Rahman seems very vocal about all sorts of financial accountability and discipline. But what about the political parties? Where are they getting their funds from?

As we talk about reforms, can we start it with the political parties? To start with, all political parties should be duly registered. It should be man-

lish their audited accounts every year. Income Tax returns of all the lawmakers should also be published. If our political parties and lawmakers are into dirty money why blame others? **Abeer Chowdhury** Singapore

datory for all political parties to pub-

Children in danger! The law and order situation in our

country has reached a dangerous level. The general people have become insecure, frustrated and scared. Incidents like the murder of Shihab, Bappi, Trisha have numbed our senses. Child related crimes are not new in our country and what is frightening is it has increased alarmingly.
The 4-party alliance has come to

power for quite a long time and so far they have failed miserably to control the law and order situation. What does the government has to say about it? Azreen Karim

Dhaka